

A Strategic Framework for Capacity Building within the ESRC National Centre for Research Methods (NCRM)

Working Version 1.0

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1. Setting the Scene

1.1 Introduction

The National Centre for Research Methods (NCRM)

The National Centre for Research Methods (NCRM) is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) as part of its strategy to improve the standards of research methods across the UK social science community. Work began in April 2004 when the 'Hub' was established within the School of Social Sciences at the University of Southampton. In the following year six 'Nodes' were added to form a network of research groups engaged in developing innovative research methods, while conducting cutting-edge social scientific research. Phase II of the Nodes began in 2008, when four of the Phase I nodes were joined by three new nodes to produce a new seven-node network. In April 2009 the programme 'Courses in Applied Social Surveys' (CASS) joined NCRM, complementing the existing provision with its short course provision.

NCRM: Mission and Objectives

NCRM was established to promote 'a step change' in the quality and range of methodological skills and techniques used by the UK social science research community. It seeks to enhance research methods by encouraging methodological innovation and supporting training to build capacity in these new methods and by acting as strategic focal point for the development and delivery of an integrated national research and capacity building programme.

The key objectives of the National Centre for Research Methods are to:

- advance methodological understanding and practice through its research programme, which will facilitate methodological innovation in quantitative and qualitative research;
- enhance the UK international profile in methodological excellence and to ensure the UK is at the forefront of international developments in social research methodology;
- enable members of the UK social science research community to learn about developments in research methods and current 'best practice' and to acquire the capacity to use these methods effectively in their research;
- undertake research and training activities relevant to research users and of benefit to the economy and society;
- play a strategic role in the promotion of high quality research methodology that involves the many inter-agency initiatives, including but not limited to those funded by the ESRC.

NCRM is unique in that it; i) acts as a catalyst for methodological innovation through the forging of strong links between research and capacity building, ii) seeks both to conduct research into innovative methods and to enhance the capacity of the social science research community to adopt innovative methods, and iii) seeks to engage with a broad range of social science disciplines and where appropriate promote interdisciplinarity in relation to methodological innovation.

Through their funding bids both Hub and Nodes of NCRM laid out their varied commitments to capacity building. These commitments represent at least 30% of the programme of activities for Nodes (See Appendix 1).

1.2 The context for research capacity building

The context in which NCRM was created

The creation of NCRM took place within a context of ESRC policy developments in relation to capacity building and was informed by influential methods initiatives such as the Research Methods Programme (RMP) - a predecessor of NCRM dedicated to improving the quality of research methods through a combination of research designed to directly enhance methodological knowledge and a set of tools designed to enhance research quality.

The ESRC commissioned a Demographic Review of UK Social Science in 2006 to identify problems in the field and recommend possible solutions involving more targeted capacity building initiatives (Mills et al., 2006). Adequate research capacity is vital to the future success of the social sciences, but strategies to help build it are complicated by the diversity of the field and the differing patterns of recruitment and retention across disciplines. The review concludes that there needs to be a more strategic approach to capacity building activities, with more flexibility in developing training provision to meet the different needs and challenges of specific disciplines, as well as targeted interventions where these are appropriate.

The current UK methods landscape

NCRM is part of a wider ESRC strategy to improve the standards of research methods across the UK social science community, providing a focal point for advanced social sciences research and capacity-building activities. It therefore aims to work closely with a range of ESRC initiatives in order to achieve co-ordination and synergies, a stance that reflects NCRM's central role within ESRC's strategic drive to improve the standards of social science research methods.

Capacity building has relevance to both the ESRC Research Resources Board and the ESRC Training and Development Board. For the Research Resources Board methods are seen alongside data as essential resources for researchers. This is reflected by investments addressing specific methodological areas such as The National Centre for e-Social Science (NCeSS), The Centre for Microdata Methods and Practice (cemmap) and the Survey Resources Network. For the Training and Development Board the focus is more on professional development and is reflected by investment in for example the Researcher Development Initiative (RDI).

ESRC and its partners (such as SFC and HEFCW) have invested with in initiatives that aim to address the research capacity building needs of specific parts of the UK. Examples include AQMEN (Advanced Quantitative Methods Network) in Scotland and WISERD (The Wales Institute of Social & Economic Research, Data & Methods).

1.3 The scope of the strategy

Our definition of capacity building

In setting out a strategic vision for what NCRM hopes to accomplish in relation to capacity building, we have adapted an earlier definition from within the social science field (Trostle, 1992) and define capacity building as:

A process where individuals, groups, networks, organisation and the wider social science community are encouraged and facilitated in enhancing their knowledge and skills so as to increase their ability to perform innovative and high quality social science research.

NCRM seeks to enhance the capacity of the social science research community, particularly in the use of innovative research methods. Whilst the primary focus may be innovative research methods, which tend to be advanced in terms of the skills and knowledge required to use them, NCRM recognises the need to provide opportunities for capacity building at what might be considered a less advanced level, in order to facilitate development and progression towards more advanced levels. The strategy also recognises the value of building the research capacity of individuals as well as specific groups of researchers.

NCRM is therefore adopting a multi-tiered approach to capacity building;

- raising awareness of NCRM's work among as large an audience as possible,
- providing more extensive support to those in this audience who want a better grounding in the methods, and
- giving tailored support to the few who wish to progress to the most advanced level.

Methods for capacity building will be varied but are understood to include, where appropriate, any or all of the following: peer discussion and exchange; repositories of resource materials; information and referral systems; conferences, forums and visiting fellowships; e-learning and face-to-face workshops and demonstrations.

The strategy will inform all NCRM-funded capacity building activity carried out by Hub and Nodes. This includes CASS short courses, the Research Methods Festival and the Autumn School (aimed primarily at capacity building within NCRM).

Whilst the strategy is intended primarily to direct the capacity building activities of NCRM, it is anticipated that it may usefully inform the capacity building activities and strategies of other groups and organisations. The strategy will therefore be made publicly available on the NCRM website. One key role of the strategy is to facilitate the planning of NCRM provision that complements and supports, but does not duplicate the capacity building opportunities offered by providers such as RDI, SRN, cemmap, NatCen Learning, SRA, MRS and Higher Education Institutions (through Postgraduate training).

1.4 Target user groups

The target user group for NCRM capacity building activities is researchers in the social science community. These researchers will work in range of different sectors: the academic sector; the public sector (local, regional and central government); the third sector and the private sector. Potential users are therefore likely to include:

- Central government and devolved governments who seek social science findings and advice;
- National bodies such as Higher Education Funding Councils and Research Councils;
- Non-governmental funding bodies and charities and voluntary bodies who make use of social science-trained skills or findings;
- Universities as corporate institutions which have a vested interest in their staff producing research and students of widely recognised quality;
- University staff who are contracted to carry out social science research and teaching;
- Professional and statutory bodies in relevant fields;
- Learned societies in the relevant fields which will seek to ensure the health of their discipline area, to publicise new developments and to attract new entrants;
- Press and media who benefit from new research and act as intermediaries in translating social science findings to a wider audience.

The largest group of users will be ‘early career researchers’ in the academic sector. Users in this constituency will have completed their postgraduate studies and will have recently been employed within funded research projects as Research Assistants, or post-doctoral Fellows.

Whilst the majority of users will be researchers who use and apply methods in their own research, NCRM recognises that there is also a need to engage more widely with those who commission and evaluate research as well as those who use research findings. NCRM also has an important role to play in engaging with those who either have the potential to be influential advocates of methodological innovation or have a responsibility for capacity building and career development of social science researchers. Four such professional groups are; Research Methods trainers (including supervisors and teachers), Principal Investigators, Research Programme Managers, and University Directors of Research. Professionals such as these could benefit from general awareness raising activities offered by NCRM as a means of developing a well-informed overview of the kinds of methods researchers might usefully learn about and apply in their own work.

The capacity building strategy aims to promote opportunities to reach out to identified target groups by responding to new developments in the academic, public, third and private sectors. An example of this would be the establishment of new Doctoral Training Centres within universities, which may present valuable opportunities to widen the reach of NCRM ‘Training the Trainer’ activities aimed at those responsible for capacity building (ESRC June 2009: Postgraduate Training Framework: A strategy for delivering excellence).

1.5 Strategy development

The second phase of Hub activity covers the period 2009-2014, whilst Phase II Nodes activity runs from 2008 to 2011. The strategy therefore needs to inform the work of Phase II Nodes, whilst being cognisant of the existing commitments they have made to capacity building in their funding applications. The strategy will also inform the specification for Phase III Nodes and will be made available to applicants to inform their proposals for training and capacity building.

The relationship between the strategy, provision and NCRM's ongoing needs analysis work is shown in Figure 1 below. Provision of capacity building activities involves a cycle of phases that include planning, design, delivery, evaluation and lesson learning. The Annual Planning Meeting feeds into the cycle at the planning stage. The design stage yields a range of activities which are recorded on the Training Database and delivered to researchers. Evaluations and lessons learnt feed into the next cycle. The strategy and the needs analyses both influence and are influenced by the various stages of this cycle.

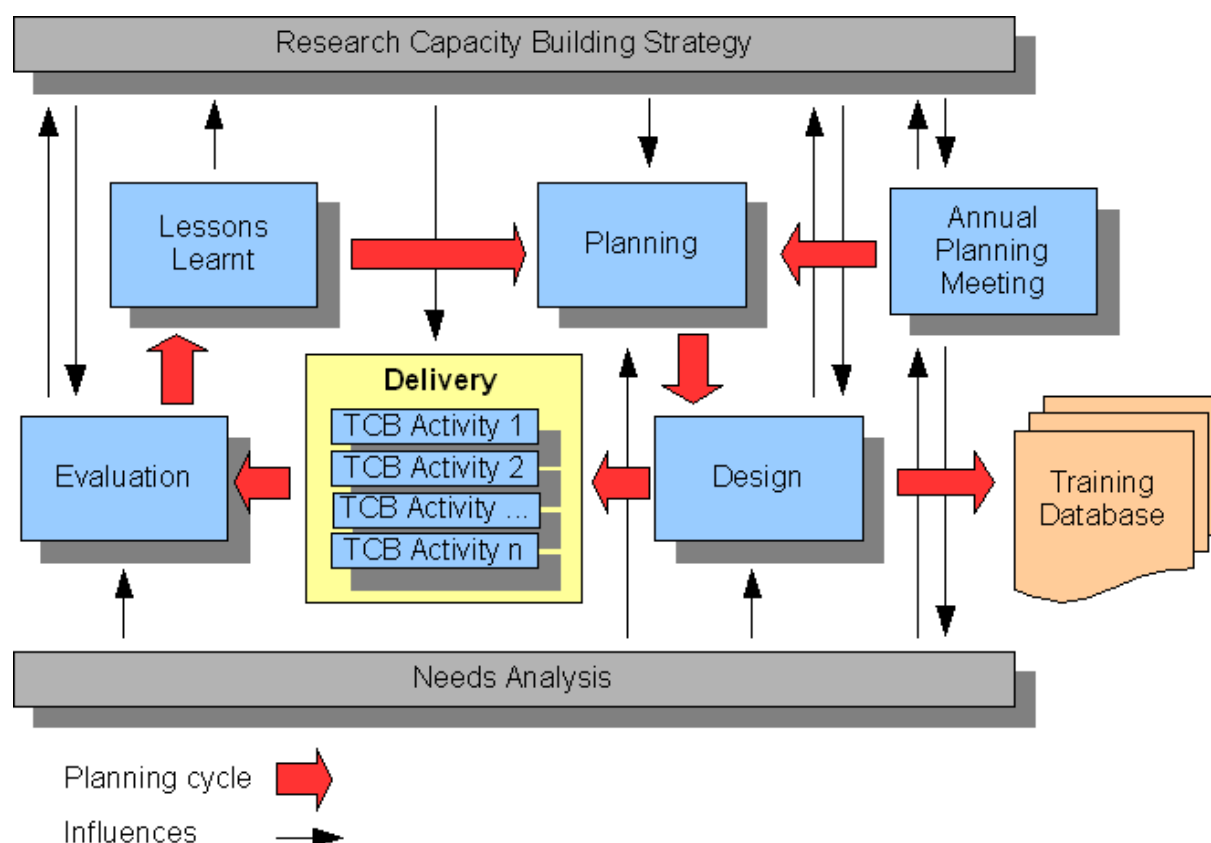


Figure 1: The role of needs analysis and evaluation work on the continual development of the strategy

1.6 Wider relevance of NCRM capacity building strategy

In terms of wider links to social science strategy NCRM's capacity building strategy speaks directly to the ESRC's key priorities (ESRC, 2008) of building capacity in world-class directed research in areas that impact upon the UK's performance in the global economy. The strategy is dedicated to a step change in training the next generation of social scientists and to maximising the economic, social and policy impact of the ESRC's funded research. It emphasises engagement with the

wider public and seeks to promote UK social scientists as international leaders in the field and as exponents of international collaboration.

The strategy promotes DIUS's Departmental Strategic Objectives (DSOs) for 2008-11 (DIUS, 2008) particularly DSO4 and DSO6.

DSO4: Pursue global excellence in research and knowledge, promote the benefits of science and society, and deliver science, technology, engineering and mathematics skills in line with employer demand

DSO6: Encourage better use of science in Government, foster public service innovation, and support other Government objectives which depend on DIUS expertise and remit

NCRM's capacity building strategy is also resonant with the Government's Ten Year Framework for Science and Innovation (HM_Treasury, 2004), with its emphasis on world-class research conducted by highly skilled researchers in centres of research excellence. The strategy directly tackles the supply of skilled social scientists by aiming to achieve a step change in research and the teaching of research methods. It seeks to promote greater responsiveness to the needs of end users and increased awareness and growing confidence among the wider public in the innovative applications of scientific research across UK society.

Methods related capacity building may also be usefully informed by parallel capacity building activities which have a different focus. For example, The ESRC national data strategy states that "...the development of data resources must be accompanied by relevant training in their use." (Elias, 2007). NCRM will seek to address the need for training in the use of data sources, both through its own work and by supporting the work of partner organisations.

2. What does NCRM seek to Achieve?

2.1 Underpinning principles and values

Three key principles underpin the development of NCRM's capacity building strategy:

- The strategy will be informed by relevant theories and models relating to learning, training and professional development;
- The strategy will inform all relevant activities of NCRM;
- The strategy will be based on a clear and widely disseminated definition of capacity building.

Four key values underpin NCRM's concept of capacity building, and these in turn underpin our strategy: **Diversity, Progression and Development, Sustainability and Excellence.**

Diversity

Capacity building activities in the context of innovative social science research methods will need to address the needs of a diverse range of learners using a diverse range of resources, methods, activities and techniques. Training is just one

of a range of things that help build capacity. These include peer discussion and exchange; self-teach repositories of resource materials; information and referral services; conferences, forums and visiting fellowships; e-learning and face-to-face workshops and demonstrations. Since training is but one of the ways we can build capacity we prefer the general term ‘capacity building’ to the somewhat tautological term ‘training and capacity building’.

In terms of ways of learning, we acknowledge that learning can be behavioural, cognitive or social in nature depending on context, purpose, target group and motivations. Our capacity building activities will therefore seek to reflect the different ways that people learn and will seek to adopt methods and approaches that are appropriate to these differences.

We recognise that NCRM capacity building activities need to be targeted at a diverse population who may:

- Avail of provision as individuals, groups, networks or communities;
- Have different discipline backgrounds (e.g. sociology, anthropology or education);
- Work in different sectors (e.g. academic researchers or governmental social science researchers);
- Have different motivations (e.g. wanting to get a broad overview of a new method, with no immediate need to apply that method or having a need to learn and apply a method to a current or imminent piece of research);
- Have different research roles (e.g. users, consumers, evaluators, or commissioners of innovative social science research methods);
- Have different responsibilities (e.g., some may not need to use a method themselves but support or manage researchers who do, and so need a broad understanding of it themselves).

Progression and development

Capacity building is a continuous process that builds on what learners already know and can do and which aims to identify, develop and facilitate learning journeys and pathways so that learners are empowered to continually develop their methodological knowledge and skills. In addition we acknowledge that social science researchers are capable, self-organising agents of their own learning who will benefit from capacity building opportunities that promote active engagement, independent inquiry and reflection on practice.

Sustainability

NCRM recognizes the need to attend to the longevity and sustainability of capacity building resources, many of which are online. The Centre seeks to increase the long-term impact of capacity building activities across NCRM by putting in place measures to allow continued user engagement with capacity building resources beyond the ‘life-span’ of funded Nodes and related NCRM activities (e.g. Networks of Methodological Innovation).

Experience from an ESRC funded and NCRM directed research project called ‘ReStore’, suggests that the full value of developing online training and resource materials typically only comes into play close to the end of a project or initiative

and that while project members may disperse and go on to other things, user awareness of the resources ‘left behind’ often grows. There is a need therefore to build into the process of development of capacity building resources an element of forward planning that focuses on maintaining or extending the lifespan of the resources.

Promoting excellence in research methods related capacity building

Within the education field certain propensities are seen as characteristic of excellence and include:

- seeking out challenges;
- creating and sustaining a shared vision;
- seeing learning as active personal development, focused on assessed needs;
- having cycles of planning, assessing, reflecting on and reporting outcomes;
- promoting growth and progression among learners;
- valuing the input of stakeholders;
- promoting the needs of the wider community.

NCRM’s strategic approach to capacity building encompasses all of these. Furthermore, strategic thinking is an active ongoing process and we continue to reflect upon, discuss and seek consensus on our core values and mission, our offer to learners, our processes and procedures, the outcomes achieved and the value of NCRM to stakeholders and to the wider community.

2.2 Strategic aims and objectives

Through its capacity building strategy NCRM will seek to achieve a range of aims and objectives under its four key values: Diversity, Progression and Development, Sustainability and Excellence.

Diversity

Aim 1: Underpin all capacity building activities with a clear conceptualisation of target groups that encompasses, but goes beyond considerations of “career stage” to include issues such as discipline, sector, motivations, roles and responsibilities.

1.1 Maximise impact by employing different capacity building activities aimed at different target groups, and by highlighting the relevance or applicability of particular method(s) to the work context of target groups.

1.2 Maintain and develop relationships with key social science research stakeholders and with external organisations representing potential target groups or having similar aims to NCRM, in order to monitor and respond to changes in their priorities and needs, arising from changes in such things as policy or funding.

Aim 2: Develop, deliver and evaluate a wide range of capacity building activities that reflect a broad spectrum of purposes and outcomes, enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of researchers and utilise the skills and experiences of personnel from across NCRM.

2.1 Develop, deliver and evaluate a range of alternative capacity building activities, employing a diverse set of methods and resources to enhance the efficiency and

effectiveness of provision, while widening coverage to meet needs ranging from “awareness raising” to specific “skill development”.

2.2 Share experiences of e-learning as a capacity building method across the Centre and explore areas of need and interest that may benefit from centre-wide collaboration.

Progression and development

Aim 3: Communicate clearly and effectively with target user groups, the pre-requisite skills, level and intended outcomes of each capacity building activity, so as to enable learners to more effectively map their needs, motivations, roles and responsibilities to the provision on offer.

3.1 Develop and implement a consistent way of describing capacity building opportunities, focusing particularly on the kind of learning that will be achieved.

3.2 Develop and enhance capacity building marketing information and material to incorporate clear guidance on how capacity building activities on offer relate to the different motivations, roles and responsibilities that learners have.

Aim 4: Plan and deliver a coherent capacity building programme that offers clear progression routes so that learners can map or plan their learning journey or trajectory.

4.1 Communicate clearly and effectively with target groups, the possible progression routes across capacity building provision so that they can map or plan their learning journey or trajectory.

4.2 Map NCRM capacity building provision against wider external provision, so that learners can ascertain what capacity building needs might be more appropriately met by non-NCRM activities and how they might gain the prerequisite skills and knowledge to attend some NCRM activities

Sustainability

Aim 5: Develop and enhance the sustainability of all capacity building related resources

5.1 Implement the practical guidance and advice on sustainability produced by the ReStore project.

5.2 Identify and, where appropriate, develop partnerships with key external organisations which have a mutual interest in hosting or maintaining capacity building resources for the benefit of the wider social science research community.

Excellence

Aim 6: Seek out and disseminate examples of innovation and excellence in research methods related capacity building

6.1 Develop collections of case studies and instances of innovation and good practice in capacity building across the centre and provide examples, through the website and other media, from which others can learn.

6.2 Maintain and develop relationships with key social science research stakeholders, making links to instances of innovation and good practice in capacity building and the supporting resources developed by these stakeholders.

Aim 7: Recognise and reward excellence in capacity building across the centre

7.1 Build into existing participant evaluation systems opportunities to report on the impact NCRM capacity building activities have had on their thinking and practice.

7.2 Develop, in consultation with key stakeholders, a process by which individuals identified as delivering innovatory, excellent capacity building opportunities can be publicly recognized and acknowledged on a regular basis.

2.3 The strategy's contribution to wider NCRM aims

The objectives of the capacity building strategy are strongly aligned to the overarching NCRM aims and are laid out in the following table.

OVERARCHING NCRM OBJECTIVES	RELATED CAPACITY BUILDING OBJECTIVES
Enable members of the UK social science research community to learn about developments in research methods and current 'best practice' and to acquire the capacity to use these methods effectively in their research.	1.1, 2.1, 3.1, 5.1, 6.1
Undertake research and training activities relevant to research users and of benefit to the economy and society.	1.1, 1.2, 2.2, 3.2, 4.1, 4.2, 5.2, 6.2, 7.1, 7.2

2.4 An evidence informed strategy

The aims and objectives of the capacity building strategy have been and will continue to be informed by a range of evidence collected both internally (needs analysis and impact assessment) and externally (published reviews and critiques of capacity building issues).

Needs analysis and impact assessments

NCRM has since its inception conducted a number of needs assessments designed to assess the capacity building needs of researchers from across the social science field. These include:

- Assessing the needs of academic researchers (Wiles, Durrant, De Broe, & Powell, 2005);
- A consultation exercise on research training needs (Bardsley & Wiles, 2006)
- Evaluating the impact of NCRM Training and Capacity Building Activities (Wiles & Bardsley, 2007);
- NCRM Reflections on TCB Activity (Wiles, 2008);

- Assessing the needs of professional social researchers (Wiles, Bardsley, & Powell, 2008).

A comparison of the needs of academic (Wiles et al., 2005) and professional researchers (Wiles et al., 2008) shows that both groups need training in quantitative skills and prefer the short course format, provided regionally. There is also some support for the use of on-line resources and training where available.

NCRM's needs analyses also reveal needs and wishes among the social science research community that fall outside NCRM's remit. Professional researchers express a wish for training in a broader range of research-related skills (project-management skills, as well as communication, presentation and influencing skills).

A perceived need for a formalised system of professional recognition appears to be a more pressing issue for professional researchers than for academic researchers and we need to recognise that the issue is and will probably remain a key distinction between academic & professional researchers for some time.

(Bardsley & Wiles, 2006) found four areas in which researchers expressed a particular need for capacity building: policy evaluation; comparative research; mixed methods and data linkage. These findings influenced ESRC's call for NCRM phase 2 nodes, as well as its call for Networks for Methodological Innovation (NMI) in 2007. As a consequence, the ADMIN and QUIC nodes are addressing the issue of combining data from different sources while National Centre for Social Research NMI is examining the use of paradata in UK social surveys.

Mid-career researchers have thus far been underrepresented at NCRM events (Wiles et al., 2005) and have at times been unable to avail of provision, due to barriers to participation such as time constraints, work commitments, specificity of work objectives and a lack of prerequisite skills needed to fully participate (Wiles & Bardsley, 2007). The strategy will look at how broadening the range of capacity building activities and innovations in their delivery might mitigate some of the problems faced by mid-carer researchers, as they look to build their research capacity in the social sciences.

In discussing capacity building issues NCRM nodes have in the past highlighted the very varied nature of their user groups. This variety is highlighted in the Hub's needs analysis studies (Wiles et al., 2008; Wiles et al., 2005) and in the Hub's impact assessment study (Wiles & Bardsley, 2007). In light of this variety it may be useful to categorise users based on discipline backgrounds sectors or motivation. This issue is discussed further below.

Reviews of capacity building

In recent years there has been a growing recognition that capacity building needs to include both formal and informal provision (Berstein, 1995; Brown, 2006; Rees, Baron, Boyask, & Taylor, 2007). One critique that discusses NCRM's work (Rees et al., 2007) argues that there is a need to put more emphasis on the social aspect of research capacity building. They argue that a great deal of highly effective research capacity building takes place through professional networks, informal as

well as formal and that more emphasis needs to be given to these sorts of learning activities.

3. Building on current NCRM capacity building activity

3.1 Existing capacity building within the Hub & Nodes

The strategy seeks to encourage NCRM to consider its current practice and the ways in which this might be developed in the future, to help deliver capacity building activities that fully meet the needs of users. The first step in this process is to consider current practice.

Existing policies, processes & systems

All NCRM capacity building activity must adhere to the following guidelines and policies:

- NCRM's publicity guidelines on promoting NCRM activity (See Appendix 5: Publicising NCRM Training & Events);
- NCRM's identity guidelines regarding the inclusion of the NCRM logo on publicity material for any event that either Hub or Nodes offer in order to fulfil their commitment to NCRM. (See Appendix 6: NCRM's Identity Guidelines);
- NCRM's charging policy regarding Centre wide set charges for all NCRM branded face-to-face training events. (See Appendix 7: NCRM's Charging Policy);
- NCRM's Guidelines regarding use of NCRM standardised forms for monitoring and evaluation of events, in particular questions to be included in registration forms for NCRM events; NCRM Course Evaluation Form and NCRM training needs questionnaire. (See Appendix 8: Guidelines on Monitoring and Evaluating Events).

NCRM runs on the basis of a set of planning cycles, one of which is the planning cycle for NCRM capacity building. Table 1 illustrates the cycle and details the planning meetings used to structure the training meeting within NCRM. NCRM regards the planning cycles as instances of good practice and will continue to adopt this approach in the future. However, if a consensus forms within NCRM that changes need to be made to the planning cycle then these will be made as appropriate.

January	February	March	April
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual Centre Meeting • Centre Management Board Meeting • Hub call to nodes for details on training events (for use in Posters & fliers) 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Methods Festival Programme Committee Meeting[§] 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hub Events Planning Meeting • Centre Management Board Meeting
May	June	July	August
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TCB strategy subgroup (Meeting 1) • Hub call to nodes for details on training events (for use in Posters & fliers) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual Planning for Training Meeting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Centre Management Board Meeting • Methods Festival[¥] 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hub Events finalised <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 4 x two-day events - 4 x one-day events
September	October	November	December
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hub call to nodes for details on training events (for use in posters & fliers) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Centre Management Board Meeting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Autumn School 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TCB strategy subgroup (Meeting 2)

- [§] Planning meeting held every 2 years - 2009, 2011
- [¥] Event held every 2 years - 2010, 2012

Table 1: The annual planning cycle for NCRM capacity building

Finally, the NCRM Communication Strategy encourages the Nodes and Hub to take a proactive approach and cooperate to arrange the Centre's representation and visibility in key events, including capacity building related events. (See Appendix 4: Linking Capacity Building with Communication)

Logistics in support of capacity building activities

The nodes are responsible for planning and delivering their own capacity building activities and for providing the administrative support needed. This includes deciding upon the nature and content of the capacity building activities, arranging for tutors to lead/deliver it, producing resources, arranging publicity, booking participants, arranging payment and collating learner feedback.

CASS, now part of NCRM, complements NCRM provision with short courses in the area of survey methods. Similar to the nodes, CASS is responsible for planning and delivering its own training and capacity building programme, which is run by the Southampton Statistical Sciences Research Institute (S3RI) at the University of Southampton.

The Hub plays an important role in co-ordinating the capacity building activities of the Nodes in order to ensure that both broad NCRM aims and specific capacity building aims are being met. The Hub also delivers its own capacity building programme, which is designed to complement the programmes of the Nodes. The

Director of the Hub has a key responsibility in overseeing and reporting on capacity building developments and progress.

Participant feedback and capacity building evaluation

Participants in all NCRM capacity building activities receive evaluation forms as part of the participant pack. The data gathered is reported within the annual report and forms the basis of the key performance indicator analysis. Revisions to the form are likely to be required to take into account Key Performance Indicators as well as new information that may be identified from previous evaluation activities.

In addition to the feedback obtained immediately following capacity building activities, the Hub conducts follow-up surveys of participants. These are scheduled to be conducted in 2009; 2011 and 2013. The 2011 and 2013 exercises are likely to involve some qualitative data collection in order to expand on our understanding of the impact of capacity building activities on participants. For example, one suggestion that has arisen is that it may be desirable in future to gather more information from participants on the end use they made of the knowledge and skills acquired through NCRM research capacity building activities, and whether it meets their needs fully (Wiles, 2008).

Research capacity building activities in the Hub

The hub hosts the NCRM website and within it provides spaces for a training database, a video archive, a links page to related projects (such as the ReStore project, which was set up with ESRC funding to sustain online resources in the field of research methods). The site also has repositories for working papers dealing with specific methodological issues, e-prints of published papers (or early drafts), commissioned reports and conference presentations.

The hub also produces an e-bulletin and a newsletter. Nodes contribute actively to both of these and contribute sessions to both the Autumn School and the Research Methods Festival described below.

The NCRM Autumn School is an annual residential three-day training event organised by the hub for around thirty early career researchers from a diverse range of disciplinary and methodological backgrounds within social science. Early career researchers working in NCRM are a key constituency for the Autumn School, but the event is also a means of drawing in early career researchers from outside of NCRM.

ESRC Research Methods Festival is a biennial event organised by the Centre to engage social scientists across a wide range of disciplines and sectors and at different points in their research careers. The programme is designed to stimulate debate, showcase new developments and highlight opportunities within the social science field. Past programmes have included awareness raising sessions and master classes on a wide variety of methods, as well as ethical and philosophical debates, information on support for researchers and trainers and the showcasing of resources.

NCRM has developed the Networks for Methodological Innovation project scheme. Commissioned and co-ordinated by the Hub these aim to stimulate discussion on new methodological challenges and new developments within specific methodological fields. They consist of a series of network-based events and related activities over a period of up to one year and will normally be of two kinds:

- Catalyzing activities: stimulating research and promoting debate on new methodological challenges among academic researchers, users and research funding bodies;
- Synthesising activities: reviewing research in a specific methodological field, or identifying commonalities between research in different methodological fields.

Each series of events involve a core group of researchers with a specific interest in the area, these will be network-based as opposed to institutionally based. Teams include international visitors, thus facilitating networking between UK social scientists and their counterpart communities overseas, and raising the profile of UK social science methodology among the international research community.

The hub has also taken over the bursary system from the ESRC Research Methods Programme (RMP) and this has enabled academic or research staff in the UK social science community to attend research methods training courses.

The programme of Courses in Applied Social Surveys (CASS) now forms part of NCRM provision. CASS originated from the ESRC Centre for Applied Social Surveys (established in 1995) and provides short courses at basic, intermediate and advanced level. The programme covers topics in survey design and implementation, survey sampling, data collection and data analysis methods and regularly attracts international presenters and experts in their fields.

Research capacity building activities in the Nodes

In addition to the multiple contributions made to hub organised activity, nodes have designed and delivered a large number of face-to-face training courses at introductory intermediate and advanced level and have developed a wide range of course material to support these.

Much of this course material has been made available online and includes e-learning modules, example data sets and software along with computer code and computer scripts used to run specific tasks, such as data analysis. E learning has also been used successfully to deliver introductory training on advanced multi-level modelling and to deliver modules from an MSc programme. An online toolkit and a post training 'blog' have also been developed.

Nodes often work collaboratively with other providers and training initiatives to provide capacity building activities across the UK. Nodes have also taken the opportunity to contribute to non-NCRM events, both nationally and internationally, with a range of provision of various durations. This includes short talks and presentations as well as workshops and training sessions lasting from half a day to 2-3 days. One node has run an e-mail and telephone helpline and some have run

post-doctoral and visiting fellowship schemes that have attracted researchers from both the UK and beyond.

4. Implementing the capacity building strategy

Once the strategy is agreed within NCRM it will be adopted by the Nodes and Hub and be used as a planning tool to inform the capacity building planning process. Whilst neither Hub nor individual Nodes have an individual responsibility to address each and every objective, The Hub and Nodes will have a collective responsibility to ensure that all the aims and objectives of the strategy are met.

Our strategic aims make clear the need for diversity in our approach to capacity building. We emphasise the need for different levels of capacity building activity aimed at researchers from different discipline backgrounds and sectors and, with different responsibilities, roles and motivations. Meeting this varied need requires a range of activity that can be viewed as a continuum from raising awareness to advanced practice in research methods

It may be useful to consider a continuum of research capacity building needs, with researchers at one end needing only a broad understanding of a particular research method, while researchers at the other end plan to apply the methods at an advanced level, perhaps in peer reviewed research. NCRM should seek to provide a range of capacity building activity to meet this varied range of needs.

4.1 Activities in relation to Aim 1

Underpin all capacity building activities with a clear conceptualisation of target groups that encompasses, but goes beyond considerations of “career stage” to include issues such as discipline, sector, motivations, roles and responsibilities.

CAPACITY BUILDING OBJECTIVES	PROPOSED ACTIVITIES	LEAD RESPONSIBILITY	TIMESCALE
1.1 Maximise impact by employing different capacity building activities aimed at different target groups, and by highlighting the relevance or applicability of particular method(s) to the work context of target groups.	The Centre will seek to maintain participation levels of early career researchers, but will also to work to increase uptake and participation levels for senior and mid-career researchers, particularly those who have a responsibility for capacity building in their own organisations. Examples include Research Methods Trainers and Directors of Research	Hub & Nodes	Ongoing

CAPACITY BUILDING OBJECTIVES	PROPOSED ACTIVITIES	LEAD RESPONSIBILITY	TIMESCALE
	The Centre will, where appropriate, engage the services of discipline or sector specific researchers/consultants who can develop sector or discipline specific examples or exercises that can then be embedded within capacity building activities and resources.	Nodes	Ongoing
	The Centre will, where appropriate develop awareness raising resources aimed at helping our target users appreciate the potential relevance of advanced methods to their research. These resources may be pitched at a less advanced level so as to encourage them to engage in more advanced capacity building activities later on.	Nodes	Ongoing
	The Centre will seek to provide a balance between providing capacity building activities aimed at large groups of participants (e.g. general awareness raising) and providing opportunities for smaller groups and individuals (e.g. one-to-one mentorship aimed at producing co-authored papers)	Hub and Nodes	Ongoing
1.2 Maintain and develop relationships with key social science research stakeholders and with external organisations representing potential target groups or having similar aims to NCRM, in order to monitor and respond to changes in their priorities and needs, arising from changes in such things as policy or funding.	The Centre will continue to contribute taster events and offer a stand presence at conferences and other gatherings organised by its partners, such as the learned societies and other social science research bodies.	Hub and Nodes	Ongoing
	The Centre's Associate Organizations Network provides a forum for discussing the issues impacting upon the social science community and the changes in capacity building needs and priorities that result. These ongoing changes will be discussed in email correspondence and placed on the meeting agenda.	Hub	Ongoing

4.2 Activities in relation to Aim 2

Develop, deliver and evaluate a wide range of capacity building activities that reflect a broad spectrum of purposes and outcomes, enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of researchers and utilise the skills and experiences of personnel from across NCRM.

CAPACITY BUILDING OBJECTIVES	PROPOSED ACTIVITIES	LEAD RESPONSIBILITY	TIMESCALE
2.1 Develop, deliver and evaluate a range of alternative capacity building activities, employing a diverse set of methods and resources to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of provision, while widening coverage to meet needs ranging from “awareness raising” to specific “skill development”.	The Centre will continue its commitment to awareness raising activities through activities such as the Research Methods Festival and the Autumn School.	Hub	Annually
	The Centre will extend the range of general awareness raising literature included in participant packs at events and activities.	Hub and Nodes	Ongoing
	In cases where practical constraints limit the number of times the face-to-face event can be repeated, the Centre will, where appropriate, develop and offer alternate forms of the ‘same’ capacity building activity: examples include downloadable self-teach resources or online/ virtual activities.	Hub and Nodes	Ongoing
	NCRM will continue to work with the ESRC Regional Training Centres (RTCs) to provide capacity building activities across the UK. Nodes and hub will be encouraged to deliver a proportion of their research capacity building activities within the RTCs and also take these as opportunities to familiarise staff (particularly new staff) with the centres.	Hub and Nodes	Ongoing

CAPACITY BUILDING OBJECTIVES	PROPOSED ACTIVITIES	LEAD RESPONSIBILITY	TIMESCALE
2.2 Share experiences of e-learning as a capacity building method across the Centre and explore areas of need and interest that may benefit from centre-wide collaboration.	The Centre will organise a range of opportunities for Hub and Nodes to share experiences of e-learning as well as learn from experts external to the Centre.	Hub, supported by Capacity Building Strategy Subgroup	This initiative will be started by a one-day event organised in the Autumn of 2009. It is anticipated that follow up events will be organised on an annual basis

4.3 Activities in relation to Aim 3

Communicate clearly and effectively with target user groups, the pre-requisite skills, level and intended outcomes of each capacity building activity, so as to enable learners to more effectively map their needs, motivations, roles and responsibilities to the provision on offer.

CAPACITY BUILDING OBJECTIVES	PROPOSED ACTIVITIES	LEAD RESPONSIBILITY	TIMESCALE
3.1 Develop and implement a consistent way of describing capacity building opportunities, focusing particularly on the kind of learning that will be achieved.	The Centre will trial and evaluate the use of Blooms learning taxonomy to describe how capacity building activity can be achieved through different levels of learning (See Appendix 2)	Hub, led by Training and Capacity Building Developer	Consultation with Hub & Nodes will begin in Autumn 2009 with a view to implementing first iteration in Autumn 2010
3.2 Develop and enhance capacity building marketing information and material to incorporate clear guidance on how capacity building activities on offer relate to the different motivations, roles and responsibilities that learners have.	The Centre will trial and evaluate a coding system to tag capacity building activities based on the target audience level of prerequisite knowledge or skill and the depth of coverage (see Appendix 3)	Hub, led by Training and Capacity Building Developer	Consultation with Hub & Nodes will begin in Autumn 2009 with a view to implementing first iteration in Autumn 2010

4.4 Activities in relation to Aim 4

Plan and deliver a coherent capacity building programme that offers clear progression routes so that learners can map or plan their learning journey or trajectory.

CAPACITY BUILDING OBJECTIVES	PROPOSED ACTIVITIES	LEAD RESPONSIBILITY	TIMESCALE
4.1 Communicate clearly and effectively with target groups, the possible progression routes across capacity building provision so that they can map or plan their learning journey or trajectory.	The Centre will produce progression guides to illustrate the progression links between the various capacity building activities and between these and related activities offered by other providers.	Hub and Nodes	Consultation with Hub & Nodes will begin in 2010, with full-scale implementation likely to start in 2011
	Where appropriate, Nodes will be encouraged to build into their evaluation strategies opportunities for recording examples where participants have engaged with the full range of capacity building activities and progressed from raising their personal awareness of advanced research methods through to implementation of advanced methods.	Nodes supported by Training and Capacity Building Developer	Consultation will start with Nodes in Autumn 2009 with a view to evaluations starting in mid to late 2010

4.5 Activities in relation to Aim 5

Develop and enhance the sustainability of all capacity building related resources

CAPACITY BUILDING OBJECTIVES	PROPOSED ACTIVITIES	LEAD RESPONSIBILITY	TIMESCALE
5.1 Implement the practical guidance and advice on sustainability of resources produced by the ReStore project.	The Centre will use sustainability guidelines produced by the ReStore project to evaluate the potential sustainability of existing capacity building resources with a view to influencing the design and development of future resources.	Hub and Nodes, supported by the ReStore team.	This activity will begin with the first e-learning focused “sharing” event and be continued on an annual basis

CAPACITY BUILDING OBJECTIVES	PROPOSED ACTIVITIES	LEAD RESPONSIBILITY	TIMESCALE
5.2 Identify and, where appropriate, develop partnerships with key external organisations which have a mutual interest in hosting or maintaining capacity building resources for the benefit of the wider social science research community	The Centre's Associate Organizations Network includes organisations which share, at least in part, NCRM's mission of promoting methodological capacity, research and development within the UK social science research community. This forum will provide an opportunity to make inter-organisational arrangements to host and/or maintain capacity building resources in a number of locations for the benefit of the wider social science research community.	Hub	Ongoing

4.6 Activities in relation to Aim 6

Seek out and disseminate examples of innovation and excellence in research methods related capacity building

CAPACITY BUILDING OBJECTIVES	PROPOSED ACTIVITIES	LEAD RESPONSIBILITY	TIMESCALE
6.1 Develop collections of case studies and instances of innovation and good practice in capacity building across the centre and provide examples, through the website and other media, from which others can learn.	Across the range of its activities, The Centre will, where appropriate, elicit, record and share examples of innovation and good practice. The locus for such practice will vary but will include Nodes, Autumn School and Networks of Methodological Innovation. The forum for dissemination will also vary but will include the Research Methods Festival and the annual centre meeting	Hub	2010 onwards
	The Centre will expand the NCRM website to include case studies of good practice in research methods and research capacity building.	Hub lead by Training and Capacity Building Developer	2011 and updated on an annual basis

CAPACITY BUILDING OBJECTIVES	PROPOSED ACTIVITIES	LEAD RESPONSIBILITY	TIMESCALE
6.2 Maintain and develop relationships with key social science research stakeholders, making links to instances of innovation and good practice in capacity building and the supporting resources developed by these stakeholders.	The centre will work closely with the ReStore Project to raise awareness of the online resources held there and the new methodological developments and updates to these resources.	Hub	2010 onwards.

4.7 Activities in relation to Aim 7

Recognise and reward excellence in capacity building across the centre

CAPACITY BUILDING OBJECTIVES	PROPOSED ACTIVITIES	LEAD RESPONSIBILITY	TIMESCALE
7.1 Build into existing participant evaluation systems opportunities to report on the impact NCRM capacity building activities have had on their thinking and practice.	The Centre will build into its planned follow-up evaluations for 2011 & 2013 questions on what impact NCRM capacity building activities have had on their day-to day work, thinking and their practice.	Hub lead by Training and Capacity Building Developer	Biennially, beginning 2011
7.2 Develop, in consultation with key stakeholders, a process by which individuals identified as delivering innovatory, excellent capacity building opportunities can be publicly recognized and acknowledged on a regular basis.	The Centre will develop and launch a process for nominating and judging innovation and excellence in capacity building, which can be repeated on an annual basis	Hub supported by Capacity Building Strategy Subgroup	An annual cycle of reward and recognition should begin in mid to late 2010
	The Centre will widely publicise both the process and the results internally and externally, using the website, quarterly newsletter and monthly e-bulletin	Hub supported by External Relations and Resources Officer	Starting mid to late 2010

5. Monitoring and evaluating capacity building

Responsibility for monitoring and evaluating how well the capacity building strategy is being implemented across NCRM lies with the Director of NCRM and the NCRM Centre Management Board (which includes Node Directors), supported by the Training and Capacity Building Strategy Subgroup.

The Training and Capacity Building Strategy Subgroup is a subgroup of the NCRM Centre Management Board. Members of the Subgroup include representatives from across NCRM Hub and Nodes (although representation from each Node is encouraged, it is not obligatory) as well as representatives from related TCB activities and organisations. The subgroup is chaired by a director or co-director of NCRM (Hub) and supported in its activities by the Training and Capacity Building Developer (located at the Hub).

The subgroup reports to the Centre Management Board and will monitor whether and how the different parts of the Centre are using the strategy and whether any problems or issues have arisen. Reports to the Centre Management Board will be dealt with as agenda items on their quarterly meetings and will be accompanied as necessary by supporting papers.

Hub members of the Training and Capacity Building Strategy Subgroup also sit on the Hub management board and will report regularly to the group on monitoring and evaluating issues, through agenda items and supporting papers.

5.1 Performance outcomes: evaluating capacity building activity

ESRC has outlined a set of key performance indicators (KPIs) for research and for training and capacity building. The choice of KPI's for the Centre is open to revision and we present here some potential additional KPI's which might be considered during any revisions. These suggested KPIs reflect a key assumption that in order to evaluate capacity building against the four values (diversity, progression and development, sustainability and excellence) and the seven strategic aims a mixed method approach will be required involving both quantitative and qualitative evaluation methods.

Diversity related KPI's:

- Total number of participants who engaged in capacity building opportunities (e.g. attendees at face-to-face, number of downloads for capacity building resources);
- The spread of participants: the number of participants from each of the four sectors (academic, public, third and private); from each discipline; from each career stage (early, middle, late career stage) and from specifically targeted groups e.g. research method trainers or Research Directors;
- The spread of opportunities: The number of different capacity building methods adopted and the level of participation with each.

Progression and development related KPI's

- The number of researchers who participated in more than one capacity building opportunity;

- The number of referrals made from the NCRM website regarding capacity building provision outside of NCRM.

Excellence related KPI's are likely to be more qualitative in nature and involve

- Qualitative assessments of the use of methods;
- Qualitative assessments of the quality of training.

5.2 Evaluating the capacity building strategy

In order to evaluate the impact of the capacity building strategy it is proposed that an evaluation study be conducted involving documentary analysis (of Hub and Node reports and capacity building related outputs) surveys and interviews.

It is anticipated that this evaluation will be able to capture rich data regarding diversity, progression, sustainability and excellence in a way that KPI's on their own cannot.

In order to inform the mid-term review of the Centre which is planned for spring 2012, the evaluation study should be completed by the end of 2011. Each Phase II Node will be expected to have an input to this evaluation which may include the provision of case studies and reflections on factors that influence successful capacity building.

It is anticipated that the evaluation study when completed will usefully add to the existing knowledge and literature on factors that contribute to successful capacity building (e.g. the TLRP "Mapping the Ripples" document by Fowler and Proctor 2008).

6. Acknowledgements

This strategy has been written by Dr Sean Moley and Dr Jane Seale in consultation with Professor Chris Skinner, Director of NCRM, the Capacity Building strategy subgroup and the Hub Management group. Persons to contact regarding the strategy:

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